

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

OIL SPILL RESPONSE FOR NON-FLOATING OILS

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Abstract:

Spilled oil can submerge or sink under a variety of environmental conditions. Several recent reports have addressed conceptual approaches regarding what can be done or describe case studies where submerged or sunken oil has been recovered. This type of approach and the results of case studies are valuable contributions. However, in the preparation of response plans or strategies it is equally important to consider the practicality and feasibility of detection, containment, and recovery. This discussion describes typical situations or scenarios where response options are practical and feasible. A response strategy or tactic may be theoretically possible, but if environmental, operational, or safety factors preclude the likelihood of a successful response, these conditions should be identified in response plans or early in the decision process on a spill so that impractical objectives are not set by the response management team.

A primary conclusion of this evaluation is that practical opportunities for dealing with submerged oil are few. Only in situations where the submerged or sunken oil can be accurately located or tracked and where recovery is a safe and practical operation is there a realistic expectation of recovery. Typically this situation can occur in shallow, sheltered waters where the oil is relatively stationary. In most other circumstances, it is not realistic to expect responders to contain or recover submerged or sunken oils.